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Ornithological Literature

Edited by Mary Gustafson

THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF WILLIAM BEEBE: EXPLORER AND NATURALIST. By Carol Grant Gould. Island Press, Washington, D.C. 2004: 447 pp., numerous photos, index. ISBN: 1559638583. $30 (cloth).—In this biography, Carol Grant Gould chronicles the long, productive life of William (Will) Beebe—a man with a driven personality, one who suffered from bouts of depression, but who was usually charming and charismatic—a complicated but insightful person. Gould had at her disposal Beebe's journals that he wrote from boyhood to old age, and the personal papers of Jocelyn Crane, Beebe's colleague and companion during Beebe's later years. These documents, not available to earlier biographers, allowed Gould to present new insights into the life of William Beebe and into the changes in natural history studies and focus that occurred as the Victorian era came to a close and natural history matured during the first half of the twentieth century. Gould describes the scientific aspects of Beebe's work effectively and handles the difficult personal aspects of his life—such as his estrangement from his first wife—with sensitivity, thus projecting a very credible story of a remarkable ornithologist and natural historian.

The book is divided into four parts: Naturalist, Ornithologist, Marine Biologist, and Tropical Ecologist. Part I, Naturalist, traces Beebe's life from his birth in 1877 through his formative years as he developed an obsession for all things natural; he collected everything from seashells to stuffed birds while "bugging" and "fossiling" with his friends. He attended Columbia University, where he was mentored by Henry Fairfield Osborn, prepared bird skins, and was sponsored for membership in the American Ornithologists' Union by Frank Chapman. He eventually left Columbia to take a job tending birds at the new Bronx Zoo.

Part II, Ornithologist, covers Beebe's early ornithological exploits. In 1904 he married, and his honeymoon consisted of a rugged expedition to Mexico that resulted in the publication of his first book, *Two Bird Lovers in Mexico* (1905, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts). Beebe became a prolific writer, producing 24 books and hundreds of scientific papers and popular articles. In 1906, he published *The Bird: Its Form and Function* (Henry Holt, Garden City, New York). Most of his books had at least some focus on birds.

Under Osborn's mentorship, Beebe became a favorite of the New York Zoological Society, which directed the Bronx Zoo, and through lectures and articles, he became well known to the high society that funded major projects, including scientific expeditions. Beebe also had a strong relationship with the American Museum of Natural History, and became a confidant of Theodore Roosevelt. All this led to funding for a series of expeditions to northern South America, and an expedition around the world to study pheasants for more than a year. That trip culminated in his four volumes: *A Monograph of the Pheasants* (1918–1922, H. F. Witherby, London, United Kingdom). Other tropical adventures involved establishing a research station in what was then British Guiana, where he collected animals for the Bronx Zoo and conducted research on a broad spectrum of animals and plants. Although his first love was always birds, he was the consummate natural historian. World War I disrupted his adventure in British Guiana, as he trained pilots for the war and eventually flew over the battle zones of France. After the war, he returned to British Guiana to set up another tropical research station under the auspices of the New York Zoological Society.

Part III, Marine Biologist, deals with Beebe's adventures in marine biology, especially his descent in the bathysphere to more than a half mile below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean near Bermuda. This earned Beebe international notoriety. With Part IV, Tropical Ecologist, we return to an ornithological and more general focus on natural history. During and after World War II, Beebe established several research stations, culminating with Ran-

cho Grande, a cliffside ruin in the Andes west of Caracas. Three winters at Rancho Grande led to one of Beebe's best books, *High Jungle* (1949, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York). Jocelyn Crane did most of the searching for a new research station and found one in Trinidad that Beebe bought and donated to the New York Zoological Society. Simla, as Beebe named the estate, became his major place of residence for the remainder of his life. Beebe invited a succession of researchers to Simla, including Konrad Lorenz, Barbara and David Snow, Lincoln Brower, and Donald Griffin. In 1962, with Jocelyn by his side, Beebe succumbed to pneumonia.

In the Epilogue, Gould comments on Beebe's contributions to science: "The effects William Beebe had on science . . . are enormous and lasting. He made an effective transition between Victorian natural historian, content to collect and classify the natural world, and the modern experimental biologist. . . . His early conviction of the truth of Darwin's theory of natural selection shaped his enquiry into the lives of pheasants, the embryology of fish, and the phenomenon of mimicry, and led him to make pioneering studies of selection on the Galapagos." In addition, through his popular books and papers, Beebe influenced several generations to develop an interest in natural history. As a boy, I read most of Beebe's books and was strongly influenced by them. In 1961, I was privileged to spend an afternoon with William Beebe and Jocelyn Crane at Simla and listen to him recount many of the stories I had read in his books a decade before.

This book is well written, thorough, and a great read. The *Selected Bibliography* just scratches the surface of Beebe's writings, but another section, *Books and Articles by Other Authors,* includes Robert Welker's previous biography *Natural Man: The Life of William Beebe* (1975, Indiana University Press, Bloomington) and Tim Berra's *William Beebe: An Annotated Bibliography* (1977, Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut) for those who wish to delve deeper into the life of this fascinating man. For those with a biographical bent, this is a must read.—WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR., Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts; e-mail: wedavis@bu.edu

HANDBOOK OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRDS, VOLUME II: PASSERINES (BLUE-WINGED PITTA TO GOLDFINCH). By R. E. Johnstone and G. M. Storr. Western Australian Museum, Perth. 2004: 529 pp., 28 color egg plates, 34 color bird plates, numerous line drawings, 3 appendices. ISBN: 1920843116. A$130 (cloth).—Western Australia, one of seven Australian states, occupies about a third of the Australian continent, and is characterized by an entirely different climate and vegetation in its northern and southern sections. Its climatic zones range from humid to desert. Hence, the avifauna varies from resident to migratory to nomadic, and occupies three zoogeographic divisions: northern tropical, southwestern temperate, and central arid zones. Detailed descriptions of climate, physical features, vegetation, and a general discussion of Western Australian avifauna are not included in this volume because they were covered thoroughly in volume I (1998); it does, however, include maps of the three zones and a map depicting biogeographical regions and botanical provinces. This volume summarizes what is known about the 255 species and subspecies of passerine birds that occur there.

The book is large (23 × 32 cm) and lavishly illustrated. Species accounts occupy the bulk of the book (364 pp.). Each of the 32 families is described briefly, usually with two or three sentences. The species accounts are thorough and comprehensive, drawing on thousands of records and measurements of all specimens in the Western Australian Museum plus many other collections. Species accounts typically include names in past and current usage; a description of plumage; measurements of weight and total length; distribution, habitat, and status; food habits and diet; breeding biology; vocalizations; geographic variation and taxonomy; and relationships with other species. Whether a bird is resident, migratory, or nomadic is discussed under *Status*, and foraging behavior is covered under *Food*. Interesting behaviors, such as communal roosting in woodswallows (*Artamus* spp.), are presented in a section of *Remarks*. Range maps show the distributions of subspecies, hybrid zones, and wintering and breeding areas, with arrows indicating migration or nomadic movements. Excellent line drawings by Martin Thompson